

**Summary from Dialogue on Education Discussion with
2008 Washington Teaching Ambassador Fellows
Blue Ribbon Schools Ceremony
October 2008**

Topic: Links between Physical Education and Students' Academic Success
Washington Teaching Ambassador Fellow: Stephanie Canada

Canada began the session by mentioning that brain research suggests a connection between physical activity and academic achievement. Working first in two groups of approximately eight educators each, and culminating with a large group discussion facilitated by Canada, participants discussed the value of physical education, evidence of impacts on academic success, and strategies and challenges in changing attitudes towards physical education and increasing students' activity levels during the school day.

Discussion in one group began with mention of the Greek notion of sound body and sound mind, the practice of calisthenics done before school in other countries, and discussed recess requirements in various states, and wellness policies. Participants discussed the importance of integrating activities during lunch, recess and both before and after school, and the need to educate parents about health needs. Examples of the innovative measures mentioned by participants included incentive programs encouraging students to walk laps in the morning, rules for keeping students active during physical education classes instituted in some schools; and integration of other curriculum into physical education such as opportunities to measure galloons, feet or yards. Participants wondering, "How do you establish common language between physical education and classroom teachers?" Canada offered final comments including recommendations such as getting donations of used exercise equipment for the classroom, getting teachers on board to model healthy lifestyles, taking candy out of rewards, and using district-wide wellness committees to help make changes such as removing soda from school grounds.

Topic: Highly Effective Teachers
Washington Teaching Ambassador Fellow: Julie Shively

Shively posed three questions to the audience: How do you identify, recruit, and support highly effective teachers, including those entering teaching as a new career? How do you use talented teachers to mentor others and support curriculum planning? And what have Blue Ribbon Schools learned about finding and keeping highly effective teachers?

Attendees broke up into about 15 different discussion groups with each group representing a cross section of states and types of schools (public, private, parochial). Discussions were animated and lively. The report out phase showed agreement among the groups in many areas: look for the best academically qualified person(s), look for a match with the school's philosophy and culture, ask rigorous questions during the interview process, look for people who want to work hard but who also know how to have fun doing it. Support and encourage all teachers, provide opportunities to learn from each other, provide structured professional development.

Topic: Valuing Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students and Parents
Washington Teaching Ambassador Fellow: Bobbi Houtchens

Today most schools serve some students with limited English proficiency. In beginning this discussion, Houtchens spoke to the importance of building on the strong family values and work ethic of immigrant families. Two questions were then posed to participants. How do your schools identify and build on the assets of these students and their parents? What instructional methods do teachers of students with limited English proficiency use to help students from diverse cultures and backgrounds achieve high academic standards?

After small groups met, they acknowledged the challenges inherent in meeting the needs of LEP students and parents but shared practical strategies for overcoming these. Groups shared techniques for making families feel welcome such as hosting small group events rather than whole-school events and providing translators for conferences and allowing more time. One group also suggested schools reach into their communities for resources. Students and families should be encouraged to become multilingual and reminded of the advantage that gives them in society. Finally, groups offered specific suggestions for better reaching LEP students in the classroom.

Topic: Data Driven Instruction and Active Learning Practices
Washington Teaching Ambassador Fellow: Jon Eckert

In beginning the discussion, Eckert briefly outlined some of his research on the use of assessment to inform instruction. Participants broke into ten groups varying from four to nine people. Conversation was extremely animated. There was a fairly active exchange of information—MAP assessment tools, Stanford’s SOS (Stressed Out Students), and Internet sources www.nwea.org, www.varklearn.com, and www.wizard4teachers.org, were all noted by participants. Two themes emerged strongly. One was the widespread practice of empowering students with tools, such as rubrics and goal setting, which make expectations for student work explicit. The other strong theme concerned the paramount importance of human relationships in schools.

Topic: Families as Full Partners in Our Schools
Washington Teaching Ambassador Fellow: Steven Hicks

Hicks began the session by describing a home visiting strategy he has used. He would set up formalized home visits with families so he could see the students in their homes, tour the house, bring three books to leave with families and model reading them for the parents, and finally incorporate what he learned during the visit into his class. The ultimate goal is to incorporate the culture of the home with the culture of the school. He then asked participants to share unique strategies they have found successful.

Participants broke into twelve groups of 3 to 5 people. Many groups reported similar strategies that varied in theme, such as family nights focused on literacy, math, science, or art. Other groups discussed how to involve more parents in the PTA by calling it a leadership group, by making meetings more interactive, or by doing more to spread out the division of labor. Some groups shared their success with making the school an educational resource for parents by opening up their computer lab to families or by having teachers host skill-building sessions for parents (e.g. resume writing, homework assistance). Other suggestions included using positive reinforcement to motivate students and teachers to reach out to parents, calling home to report good behavior as well as bad, and working to ensure that communication flows to and from the school.